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Amanda B. Albert
Washington University in St. Louis, amandabalbert@wustl.edu

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CHAPTER 30

Transformative Learning:

Changing ESL Students' Research Methods through the Examination of the Processes of Information Creation

Amanda B. Albert
Information Literacy Coordinator
Washington University in St. Louis

ACRL Information Literacy Frame: Information Creation as a Process
Discipline: Arts & Humanities
Subject: English as a Second Language
Learning Theories: Transformative Learning; Constructivism
Special Populations: English Language Learners

Teaching information literacy to English language learners (ELL) or English as a second language (ESL) students can be challenging due to language and cultural differences that are brought to the classroom. A librarian must acknowledge and navigate differences between international student cultures and the librarian's culture, oftentimes in just one or two instruction sessions. On top of these perceived barriers, ELL students bring with them varying ideas and experiences regarding research, academics, and libraries shaped by their cultural, institutional, and historical experiences. Through my own discussions with ELLs, many have never participated in an information literacy instruction session before, may view librarians as gatekeep-

ers of the books whose only task is to retrieve books from stacks, or have never interacted with trained librarians. In this environment, librarians need to understand the sociocultural makeup of students in order to have a successful interaction. Librarians should strive to be culturally competent instructors, "abiding by the norms and mores of the specified group, with regard to participatory roles in social interactions and culturally important factors that can impact the educational experience."[1] Along with this, the librarian should strive to understand the academic attitudes and research methodologies of ESL students, as librarians are often implored by ESL instructors to help students understand the American or "western" way of operating in a higher education institution. As a librarian unaccustomed to working with ELL students, I scoured the literature and asked for guidance from experienced instructors in order to begin to understand the students I encountered in the classroom.

After teaching twenty-five information literacy instruction sessions, conducting ten research consultations with international students, and working closely over the course of two and a half semesters with faculty in the English for Academic Purposes program at Saint Louis University, I have found that ELLs are similar to many of their American counterparts when it comes to basic ideas about the research process. Culturally, their ideas about the library and its functions may be different, but when it comes to the research process, the American and international students I have taught believe research should be quick and easy, and they are easily satisfied with the first few articles they read. Closely examining college students' general ideas about research, those I have observed have ingrained beliefs, attitudes, and habits about what constitutes research and scholarly activity. Two consistent challenges I have run into in the classroom are: (1) students arrive to class not only with a chosen topic but with a full argument in place without having conducted any background research and desire to find information sources that fully support this argument; and (2) students are told that they need to find "X" type of resources (scholarly, peer-reviewed academic journal articles) without much discussion of how or why they may use this information in their assignment. Instead of approaching an assignment from a place of inquiry, students are fixed within a rigid paradigm of research as a series of boxes to check off. A "no questions asked" approach inhibits creativity, stifling a student's ability to contribute effectively to the scholarly conversation. As an ESL librarian, I want

students to find their voices and to be able to exercise them creatively. We can overcome obstacles to this endeavor via careful and intentional lesson planning, asking the essential questions, and creating an open discourse.

ACRL Information Literacy Frame: Information Creation as a Process

Information as a Creation Process is described in the framework as "information in any format is produced to convey a message and is shared via a selected delivery method. The iterative processes of research, creating, revising, and disseminating information vary, and the resulting product reflects these differences."[2] Two knowledge practices in this frame directly relate to the challenges we wish to overcome in the ESL/ELL classroom:[3]

1. Assess the fit between an information product's creation process and a particular information need.
2. Develop, in their own creation processes, an understanding that their choices impact the purposes for which the information product will be used and the message it conveys.

Learning Theories: Transformative Learning and Constructivism

Two learning theories can be employed to facilitate the attainment of these two knowledge practices: constructivism and transformative learning theory. Within constructivist learning theory there are four agreed upon characteristics:[4]

1. Learners construct their own meaning.
2. New learning builds on prior knowledge.
3. Learning is enhanced by social interaction.
4. Meaningful learning is developed through "authentic" tasks.

Transformative learning builds upon constructivism, adding another layer. Learners' beliefs are challenged and they become critical of their ways of thinking, thus affecting how they see the world. ESL students' historical ideas about research play an enormous role in their existing beliefs. In a transformative learning classroom, students are presented with ideas or problems that are disruptive or contrary to their existing models. The students are guided to critically examine this idea or problem, reflect on

their own assumptions, and engage in discourse. These processes take students on a journey, facilitating growth in new thinking experiences.

A caveat to this process is that it may take a long time; many students reflect on beliefs and ideas for years before they accept new ideas and act on them.[5] Jack Mezirow, the founder of transformational learning theory, describes four processes or approaches to transformative learning:[6]

1. Elaborate on an existing point of view (POV)—does not require the learner to change their POV, but rather asks the learner to broaden their definition of something
2. Establish new points of view—does not require the learner to change their POV, but rather allows the learner to add a new POV.
3. Transform a POV—as a result of critical reflection of the learner's misconceptions, the learner may alter their existing POV.
4. Transform a habit of mind—to achieve this, the learner must confront their own biases via critical reflection.

Critics of transformational learning express concerns, first among them being: Do educators have the right to impose situations that ask learners to reevaluate basic assumptions about the world? We run the risk of imposing our positions on the learner.[7] Thus, we need to be sure to check our own biases and habits of mind that influence our instructional methods and processes. There are ways for us to provide the students with a learner-centered experience rather than an instructor-centered one. This involves allowing the students to take charge of their own learning, asking the essential questions that even we may not know the answer to or allowing the students to generate these questions and engaging the students in critical reflection.[8]

Making the distinction between challenging cultures versus challenging the students' thinking about a research process is very important for this type of instruction session. We are not asking the students to change their cultural beliefs, their identities, or historical make-up; rather, we are providing them with an alternative POV and asking them to consider expanding their beliefs on an academic process. By incorporating our students' specific cultures and sociocultural identities into the classroom, we can reduce the risk of alienating students. It is also an opportunity for the instructor to learn from the students' experiences and ways of knowing, which maximizes the "impact of the lesson by making the students feel comfortable in the learning environment."[9] Understanding your students' particular cultural beliefs about research and how they use these beliefs to

interpret information allows you to establish a "starting point of common knowledge."[10] Ultimately, this also helps the librarian avoid stereotyping, which can corrode student/instructor relationships.

This lesson plan addresses the two aforementioned knowledge practices within Information Creation as Process through the lens of constructivism and transformative learning theory. Activity one sets up the following two activities by introducing essential questions about students' concepts of information and how to use information in a research assignment. The questions ask students to reflect on their own ideas while preloading future conversations about using information to appeal to an audience and seeking out other points of view. Activity two asks students to examine specific resources, grappling with their characteristics and how scholars might use these sources. Finally, the optional activity three invites students to think more deeply about resources as a writer would, including how they might use the resources in their own upcoming assignments. Many ESL students haven't thought about information sources in this way, and it is an opportunity to start to transform their thinking.

A best-case scenario for this lesson plan would be to approach the session by seeking to elaborate on or establish one to two new points of view. Seeking a transformation of a POV or habit of mind is a difficult task requiring scaffolding of instruction and repetition throughout a student's tenure. The worst-case scenario would be to achieve no such change and the learner does not broaden their view or seek to understand a new POV. To avoid this, I recommend working closely with the ESL faculty to get as much face-time with as many classes as possible. I have had numerous experiences over the course of a few semesters where I have taught the same students three of four times. Oftentimes, the instructors are asking me to teach the same set of skills, so I try to have a few different lesson plans that allow me to repeat myself but keep the activities new and interesting. If this isn't possible, a multifaceted approach with in-person instruction, research appointments, and instructional videos allows the students to review a concept repeatedly but in varying formats.

Lesson Plan

Learner Analysis

- English Language learners may come to the classroom with pre-

conceived notions about the library or librarians, including ways of using the library resources, ways of interacting with library staff or faculty, and ways of conducting research.
- This lesson works well because it gives students the opportunity to reflect on their ideas and gives the librarian an opportunity to work with the students in expanding these ideas via essential questions.
- Students also interact with sources in a way that may be different from their experiences in school in their home countries, exposing them to concepts, such as inquiry, that may be useful to them as a student in an American institution.

Limitations and Opportunities

Librarians may not speak other languages, so this is an obvious limitation working with the international student population. After interacting with these students for a period of time, it is easy to observe the following three limitations:

1. Avoid slang and be direct. Say exactly what you mean to avoid misunderstandings.
2. Avoid jargon. Provide students with a list of common library terms.
3. Avoid "dumbing" down the instruction session. Speak with the instructor beforehand to get a feel for the level of learning students are expected to be able to achieve.

Teaching in the ESL classroom allows the instructor to grow immensely. Librarians have the opportunity to learn as much from the students as students do from the librarian. They offer thoughtful suggestions in the classroom, and the language barrier is one that empowers the librarian to only become a better instructor.

Orienting Context and Prerequisites

Pre-instruction learner tasks

- Encourage students to examine the course syllabus for the upcoming assignment. Take time to understand the parameters of the assignment. Ask the instructor for clarification.
- Come to class with questions.

There are no learner prerequisites.

Instructional Context

Teaching Environment

- tables for group work and discussion
- computers for searching
- projector screen
- easel pads/dry erase board
- markers

Pre-instruction work

- Work with the instructor to discuss the assignment and resources students are asked to find. Talk about overcoming common misconceptions about resources and the appropriateness for the scholarly context—for example, avoiding the good source/bad source binary.
- Find articles that meet BEAM criteria (see learning activity three).
    - ▷ BEAM stands for Background, Exhibit, Argument, and Method. Some people prefer BEAM/T where T is Theory.
    - ▷ This is essentially a different way to teach students about primary, secondary, and tertiary sources without calling them by those names, or it provides learners with "an alternative vocabulary that emphasizes use."[11] Instead, the learner is interacting with the sources and thinking about them as a writer would in a piece of writing. For example:
        - ♦ Background: sources present information as "facts," often common knowledge.[12] These include newspaper articles, books/book chapters, reports, etc.
        - ♦ Exhibit: sources that are to be explicated, interpreted, and analyzed.[13] These include diaries, interviews, raw data, photographs, literature, etc.
        - ♦ Argument: sources that are affirmed, disputed, refined, or extended.[14] These include scholarly books or journal articles.
        - ♦ Method/theory: Sources allow the writer to derive a governing concept or theory or to establish a critical lens.[15] These sources include scholarly encyclopedias, methodological articles, or book chapters, etc.

Learning Outcomes and Learning Activities

Learning Outcomes

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to

1. analyze librarian-supplied resources for their creation process in order to evaluate the appropriateness of the resource for a given assignment;
2. evaluate librarian-supplied resources for their purpose in order to understand how to use similar resource types to strengthen their creative works; and
3. discuss the value in seeking other points of view in order to approach resources from a place of inquiry.

Learning Activities

1. Essential Questions *(LO3, 15 minutes, essential)*
    - While essential questions are not answerable within one instruction session, they are introduced in one session and grappled with over the course of a semester or an entire college experience. The following questions are used to prompt students to reflect on their own research and information creation processes, which they will grapple with throughout their university career and beyond. These questions can be asked and answered in small or large group discussions, individually (written down), or a combination of both.
        - ▷ Discussion/reflection (essential questions). Students answer these questions on their own and/or discuss with their classmates:
            - ♦ How do researchers gather and use information?
            - ♦ What is the way to appeal to an audience's empathy? What information would be useful or compelling?
            - ♦ Why is it important to seek opinions or viewpoints that differ from your own? How would this strengthen an argument?
2. Creation Process *(LO1, 20 minutes, essential)*
    - Students divide into groups of three or four (keeping groups small works best).
    - Each group examines instructor-chosen sources by
        - ▷ Evaluating the creation process using the following criteria:

- ♦ Describe the creation process of this source.
- ♦ Describe the author(s)' credentials.
- ♦ Describe why the source was created.

▷ Evaluating other criteria:

- ♦ What format does this source inhabit (digital, print)?
- ♦ Describe the physical or virtual qualities of the resource; for example, page length, citation style or lack thereof, publisher, date, and so on.

▷ Summarize, as a group, (on large sheets of easel pad paper or whiteboard) the source's creation process.

▷ Students answer debrief questions:

- ♦ How do you think the creation process affects your decision of whether or not to use this resource in your assignment?
- ♦ How does the format of the source affect how you may use it in your assignment?
- ♦ How did this exercise make you feel?

3. BEAM Activity *(LO2, 20 minutes, optional)*
   - BEAM activity:
     - ▷ Participate in a group discussion about BEAM criteria (Background, Exhibit, Argument, and Method).
     - ▷ Students discuss instructor-distributed articles and categorize them based off of the BEAM criteria. Using an easel pad paper, categorize articles by placing them face down on the appropriately labeled paper so other groups won't know what article each group thought belonged in each category.
     - ▷ Debrief: Group discussion about why the articles belonged in the various categories, what the author was trying to accomplish with the article, and how they might use the article in an assignment.

Assessment

Formative (in class discussion and reflection)

- Students can articulate the creation process of various information products.
- Students can articulate why they think various types of resources

are appropriate for their assignment and how they would actually use these resources.
- Student responses. These can be recorded by students and/or instructor on a piece of paper/Word or Google Document, or verbal responses given and discussed in class.
- Easel pad paper students use in class are collected and evaluated for how the students responded on the paper.

Summative (post-class evaluation of student final assignments)

- These works should be evaluated to see how students actually selected and integrated information resources into the assignment (see Appendix 30A—Rubric based on Gola, et al. Developing and IL Assessment Rubric).[16]
- Behavior changes:
    - ▷ consider other viewpoints than their own
    - ▷ incorporate various types of sources into their projects or papers

Appendix 30A

Rubric based on Gola et al. Developing an IL Assessment Rubric[16]

	Novice	**Developing**	**Competent**
Selects appropriate resources based on the creation process of the resource.	Identifies few sources of information, mostly Google or websites. Select sources that have not undergone any review. Uses only sources that are non-scholarly when reviewed material would be expected.	Identifies various sources of information, including newspaper or magazine articles, books, e-books, and websites/Google. Uses sources that have been through some basic review processes.	Identifies a multitude of sources including primary and secondary sources. Selects sources that have undergone a rigorous peer-review process. Selects a variety of sources with a demonstrated understanding of context and domain.
Uses resources of sufficient breadth to strengthen creative works.	Extent of information used in project/paper is not sufficient. Resources cited are non-scholarly when reviewed material would be expected. Resources are "dumped" into the paper without regard to creativity.	Uses the required amount of resources for paper. Sources are varied and presented in a balanced way. Attempts using sources to bolster the project/paper's argument, perspectives, or summary where appropriate.	Information used is comprehensive and thorough. Sources demonstrate an understanding of the content including its limits. Uses sources creatively to enhance a project/paper in an engaging way.

Integrates various types information and point of views into work.	Does not acknowledge there are other points of view on a topic. Cited resources are not appropriate in terms of point of view, primary/ secondary, or level of academic quality. Sources are not integrated properly; rather, information is presented piecemeal.	Acknowledges there are other points of view about a topic. Incorporates minimum number of sources required by instructor into a project/paper. Some attempt at integrating sources into project/paper in an engaging way.	Actively searches for other points of view and critically evaluates them. Incorporates a variety of other points of view into assignment integrating the information seamlessly. Cited resources show variety of point of view, primary/ secondary, or level of academic quality.

Notes

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8. Grant P. Wiggins and Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design*, 2nd ed. (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2005); Maryellen Weimer, "Learner-Centered Teaching and Transformative Learning," in *The Handbook of Transformative Learning: Theory, Research, and Practice*, ed. Edward W. Taylor, Patricia Cranton, and Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 439–44.
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10. Ibid., 34.
11. Joseph Bizup, "BEAM: A Rhetorical Vocabulary for Teaching Research-Based Writing," *Rhetoric Review* 27, no. 1 (2008): 75.
12. Ibid., 75.
13. Ibid.
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15. Ibid., 76.

16. Christina H. Gola, Irene Ke, Kerry M. Creelman, and Shawn P. Vaillancourt, "Developing an Information Literacy Assessment Rubric: A Case Study of Collaboration, Process, and Outcomes," *Communications in Information Literacy* 8 no. 1, (2014): 131–44.

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